

Newsweek

Time 24

U.S. News & World Report

Date 20 May 1991

## Webster Bids Farewell to Langley

**P**resident George Bush and CIA Director William Webster clowning around like high school kids last week at a news conference called to announce Webster's resignation from the agency. "We're going to miss you, pal," Bush said. Webster thanked the President, praised him and quipped, "I know a good thyroid when I see one."

It was the end of Webster's four-year stint at the helm of America's vast intelligence network. He had ably carried out the mandate given to him at the outset: to restore the CIA's image and accountability, both of which had been badly damaged by his predecessor, the devious and headstrong William Casey. "Webster improved relations with Congress. Internally, he established stricter rules," says David Whipple, a former senior CIA official who now heads the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. "He did his job very well."

A former FBI director and federal judge, Webster improved cooperation between the agency and the bureau on counter-intelligence matters. He increased to an all-time high the number of CIA officers involved in recruiting agents abroad. He also began reorienting intelligence priorities for a world in which the Warsaw Pact had collapsed and economic and

Third World issues were becoming increasingly important.

But Webster was also criticized for not playing a sufficiently forceful role in the Administration. The President disagreed: "There's always some s.o.b. who thinks Webster ought to be making policy the way Bill Casey did," Bush told his aides. Yet opinion in Washington is nearly unanimous in the view that Webster did not develop the mastery of foreign policy or of intelligence issues needed to steer the ship of spookdom through the uncharted 1990s.

The leading contenders to replace Webster at the agency's Langley, Va., headquarters are Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates and Ambassador to Beijing James Lilley, who ended his two-year stint last week. Gates, a respected former CIA Soviet analyst who was Casey's deputy, is the odds-on favorite among White House staff members. But he would face careful questioning by the Senate about his knowledge of the Iran-contra affair. Lilley, a former CIA operations officer, became close to Bush when the future President served as head of the U.S. diplomatic mission to Beijing in 1974. Both Gates and Lilley appear well qualified to head what Webster last week rightly called the "healthy organization" he is leaving behind. ■